



Changing Attitudes

By Michelle Derrig

I totally understand how the thought of something terrible happening to your precious child can be too much to bear.

Sometimes it's easier to tell yourself that nothing like *'that'* will ever happen to your child. Sometimes it's easier to believe that no one in *your* circle of friends and family would ever deliberately hurt or abuse your child. Sometimes you just want to bury your head in the sand, rather than think about the *horrific evil* in the world. I get it – I used to feel like that too!

However, the sad truth is that we are putting our kids at risk with this attitude and that we as parents instead need to confront the sad reality of childhood sexual abuse in our society. As the primary caregivers of our children, we have a responsibility to educate ourselves, so that we can in turn empower our children to protect their body and their privacy.

My epiphany came about one night, when I was out for dinner with some friends. On this night I heard about two young children who'd been sexually abused by children their own age. In both

cases, the incidents took place on playdates, whilst the mums chatted and the children supposedly played. In the first case, 7 year old *Jake was brave enough to disclose the abuse to his mum on the way home from the park. In the second case *Kylie's mothers intuition kicked in and she decided to check on the 9 year old boys in the toilets, only to discover the abuse.

As I listened to these mothers share their stories, I was totally shocked. I had never considered my children to be at risk of abuse by their own peers; nor had I ever imagined my children could experience abuse while under *my* supervision. I returned home haunted by these stories and soon realised that my children were just as much at risk as these other young victims.

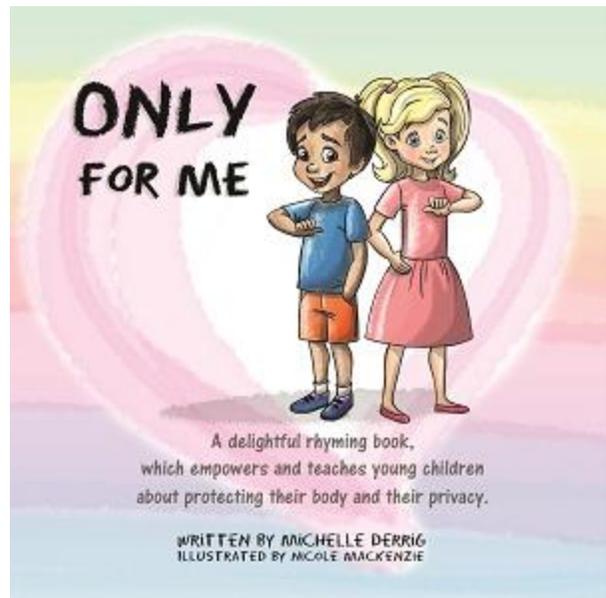
As a concerned mother I started researching how best to protect my children and quickly realised that the main weapon we have as parents is to empower our kids with the knowledge that their body is private and that they have a right to protect their privacy. However, I also wondered *what exact information should I impart, how much detail should I give and how do I broach such a*

confronting subject without frightening them, or ruining their innocence?

As I reflected upon the complexity of these issues and how best to solve them, I became inspired to create a resource that would help parents facilitate protective behaviour conversations with their own children. I spent two years researching and consulting with expert professionals, educators and adult survivors of child abuse and in July 2016 my protective behaviours picture book ‘Only For Me’ was released to critical acclaim.

Throughout the SAFE Kids Series I will be further unpacking this confronting and challenging subject. I will breakdown the statistics and realities of child abuse, I’ll tell you what information you need to impart and how to go about developing their problems solving skills. I will also discuss the dangers of keeping secrets and the importance of

nurturing a relationship, where your child feels comfortable confiding and disclosing. Essentially, I will be educating you as parents and equipping you with the tools you need to empower *your* precious children.



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